CHAPTER 8. THE LATE-MIDDLE GROUP

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The Late-Middle Group comprises burials that have been distinguished from the main group because of stratigraphic relationships or because artifacts found with them are datable to the final third of the 18th century. It is possible that there is some overlap between the Late Middle and the Late Group, defined as post-1776. Nevertheless, in order to keep those burials that are most securely assignable to the later period (see Chapter 9) analytically distinct, we have separated out a Late Middle cohort, and for convenience use the start of the Revolutionary War as the end date. We use 1760 as an approximate beginning date for Late-Middle burials, though some overlap between the Middle and Late-Middle Groups is likely, since in many cases temporal group assignment is based solely on stratigraphic position. Relatively few burials (n=56) are assigned to the Late-Middle Group.

A sketch of the town and its population precedes the presentation of the Late-Middle Group mortuary sample. The material culture, spatial distribution, and some unique and unusual burials assigned to this group are then discussed.

8.A.   *The town*

This period opens with the French and Indian or Seven Years War (1754-1763), over the course of which thousands of soldiers were quartered in the city and thousands of sailors manned ships in the harbor (for a description of the city in these years, see Burrows and Wallace 1999:165-222). New barracks to house the troops had to be constructed, and the buildings were sited in the northern part of the town Common just south of the African Burial Ground. The city's merchants prospered during and after the war. Following the war the growing trade of the port and the marketing of goods that began to flow to the colonies as a result of the Industrial Revolution in England fed the local economy and the fortunes of the local elite; artisans also benefited from a boom in construction during and after the war. The town continued its northward growth, though the fashionable families remained downtown.

Residential development along Broadway began to encroach upon the western side of the burial ground during these years. The town is best depicted on the Ratzer Map of 1767 (Figure 2.11) for the Late-Middle burial cohort. A composite map (covering the entire period 1730 to 1770) prepared for the book *Gotham* (Burrows and Wallace 1999:206) is also useful for locating streets, churches, and public buildings throughout the city. Isaac Teller (one of the heirs of the Van Borsum Patent) built three houses along Broadway near present-day Chambers Street sometime between 1760 and 1765, and two other

houses stood to the north of these. Teller's fence, reportedly with a locked gate, also went up in this period (see Chapters 2 and 4). Buildings that may have been associated with the Campbell pottery abutted the cemetery on the northwest along the property line; buildings that may have been part of the Crolius/Remmey pottery operation were further to the east, also along the property line. On the town Common just south of the burial ground a jail and a cemetery for the almshouse were erected in 1757; in 1775 the Bridewell went up. Although this part of town was no longer remote, it was still marginal in a social sense, what with the concentration of public institutions for the criminal, the homeless, the insane, and the impoverished, not to mention the place of execution.

As neighborhoods moved northward, churches also appeared in the northern precincts (see Rothschild 1990:25-80). Many churches had at least small numbers of black congregants by this time. An important development was the founding of the Methodist Church in New York, the first meeting of which was held in 1766 and a permanent home built in 1768. The Methodists welcomed blacks and were anti-slavery. The black membership in the beginning included small numbers of mainly enslaved men and women, but reports from the early 1770s suggest that the numbers of blacks who came to hear the Methodist preachers grew quickly (Walls 1974:39-40).

Complete segregation and restrictions on full participation by blacks within the churches was the norm, however. At John Street, as at the other churches, blacks sat in the loft and entered by a separate stair, and black members met in separate "Negro classes" led by white men (Walls 1974; John Street Methodist Church, 1785-90). Segregation extended to the churchyards. Burial records survive for this period for the Dutch Reformed, Anglican (Trinity as well as St. Paul's and St. George's Chapels), Lutheran (Trinity, Christ, and United), Moravian, Baptist, and German Reformed churches of Manhattan, and of those examined only the Dutch church recorded the burial of blacks in the 1760s -- just three individuals, and even for these the location of the burials is not known (Reformed Dutch Church 1727-1804). In 1773 Trinity (Anglican) Church's black membership was substantial enough to warrant some provision for burials, and the church established its own small African cemetery at the corner of Church and Reade Streets (just one block west of the African Burial Ground). Trinity also allowed the 1774 burial of an enslaved woman named Mary, arranged and paid for by her master Evert Bancker, at the "English" churchyard (Trinity), suggesting the occasional paternalistic gesture (House Expense Book of Evert Bancker, cited in Foote 1991:146; it is possible other blacks were interred in elite family vaults or plots as well, but there is no evidence for the general practice).

Importation of captives continued down to the eve of the Revolution, with the 1760s and 70s seeing the greatest volume of direct trade between New York and Africa. Doubtless a high proportion of African-born people entered the local black community (Lydon 1978:378-381). It was in March 1762 that merchant John Watts wrote that captives for the New York market "must be young the younger the better if not quite Children" (Watts 1762-1765). Two large shipments of captives direct from the continent, a total of

196 persons, arrived at the city docks in 1763 and at least 59 more African-born captives were recorded here between 1768 and 1772 (Lydon 1978:382-383).

8.B.   *The population*

Census

After a slight drop from the 1740s to 1750s, the black population of New York City grew substantially again between 1756 and 1771 (Table 8.1). The 38% increase was accounted for mainly by adults, and by more women than men, with the adult sex ratio dropping to 85.9 in 1771.

The adult male category included 68 men over 60 years of age in 1756 and 42 over 60 in 1771. This absolute and proportional drop in elderly men may reflect natural attrition accompanied by increased importation of younger men. As a proportion of the city's total population, blacks dropped to 14.3%, outstripped by accelerating European growth (presumably through both immigration and natural increase).

Table 8.1. Black population by age and sex, 1756-1771						
Year	**Adults**		**Children**		**Age for children**	**Label in census**
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)		
1756	672	695	468	443	<16	"black"
1771	932	1085	568	552	<16	"black"
Source: Green and Harrington (1932); U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909).						

Mortuary sample

The 60 burials assigned to the Late-Middle Group are listed in Table 8.2 and their distribution within the excavated portion of the cemetery is shown on the site plan in Figures 8.1a-e. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. An entry of "n/a" in the coffin column indicates that the bones were severely disturbed, displaced, or redeposited so that coffin presence/absence could not be determined. Age and sex profiles are shown in Figures 8.2 and 8.3.

As explained in Chapter 5, we believe that subadults are under-represented in the age profile because children's burials that might actually belong in the Late Middle Group were buried in, above, or near existing graves from earlier periods, and such children's burials cannot be distinguished.

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preser-vation	Coffin
Table 8.2. Late-Middle Group burials								
B004	30	40	male		11	86.5	n	n/a
B004A	20	25	male?		11	86.5	n	n/a
B005	0.5	1	undete	90	9	86.5	y	unident.
B007	3	5	undete	105	15	80.5	y	hexagonal
B010	40	45	male	88	20	82.5	y	hexagonal
B011	30	40	male?	90	12	83.5	y	hexagonal
B013/43	2.5	4.5	undete	90	-7	105	y	four-sided?
B019			undete	108	20	81.5	y	unident.
B021			undete		20	87.5	n	rectangle
B042	0	2	undete	76	45	91.5	y	hexagonal
B054			undete	90	-4	92	n	unident.
B060	0.25	0.75	undete	95	-1	95	y	four-sided?
B061			undete	82	45	87.5	n	unident.
B064	0.38	0.88	undete	82	45	92.5	y	hexagonal
B067	40	50	male	88	0	94	y (no cranium)	unident.
B089	50	60	female	92	48	90.5	y	hexagonal
B091	0.67	1.3	undete	84	48	95	y	hexagonal
B101	26	35	male	78	49	88.5	y	hexagonal
B105	35	45	male	89	60	95	y	hexagonal
B106	25	35	female?	92	71	90.5	y	hexagonal
B107	35	40	female	93	48	90	y	hexagonal
B108	0.25	0.75	undete	68	53	87	y	hexagonal
B109	0.67	1.33	undete	126	54	90.5	y	hexagonal
B119	35	45	male	93	72	88.5	y	hexagonal
B123	0.67	1.33	undete	96	80	89.5	y	hexagonal?
B145			n/a	95	74	73.5	n (empty coffin)	hexagonal
B146	0	0	undete	102	74.5	73.5	y	hexagonal
B168			male	90	68.5	95.5	n	n/a
B176	20	24	male	103	65.5	74.5	y	hexagonal
B198			undete	113	80	86.5	y	four-sided
B216	0	0.16	undete	104	57	78.5	y	rectangle
B219	4	5	undete	87	122	71.5	y	unident.
B222			male?	95	118	76.5	y (no cranium)	hexagonal
B229	6.75	11.25	undete	108	72	83.5	y	unident.
B235	28	42	female	85	123	71.5	y	hexagonal
B238	40	50	male	102	62	78.5	y	hexagonal
B251	12	14	undete	101	79	79.5	y	hexagonal
B253	13	15	undete	96	65.5	82.5	y	hexagonal

							Table 8.2. Late-Middle Group burials	
Burial	**Low age**	**High age**	**Sex**	**Head angle**	**Grid East**	**Grid South**	**Preser-vation**	**Coffin**
B267			undete	105	94	82.5	y	hexagonal
B289	5	9	undete	89	125	81	y	tapered
B290	45	55	male	89	114	84	y	hexagonal
B311	0.25	0.75	undete	100	99.5	88.5	y	tapered
B314	40	50	male	97	134	82	y	hexagonal
B316	18	20	female	95	99.5	88.5	y	hexagonal
B317	19	39	male?		220	91.5	n	unident.
B319			female		249	88.5	n	unident.
B332	35	40	male?	92	126	80.5	y	hexagonal
B333	45	55	male	121	230.5	81.5	y	rectangle
B338	33	65	female	92	133.5	84.5	y	hexagonal
B352			male	100	131	67.5	y	hexagonal
B357	45	65	male	109	228.5	72	y	no coffin
B362			undete	119	235	69.5	y (cranium only)	unident.
B373	45	60	female	100	132	70.5	y	hexagonal
B376	45	65	male	98	134.5	77	y	hexagonal
B377	32.6	57.8	female	103	235	75.5	y	no coffin
B381			undete		235	75.5	n (not excavated)	n/a
B391	16.5	19.5	male	90	140.5	68	y	no coffin
B392	42.5	52.5	male		140	71.5	y	rectangle
B395	43	53	male	107	135.5	76.5	y	hexagonal
B413	50	70	female	95	175.5	62.5	y	hexagonal

SEE FIGURE 8.1d

SEE FIGURE 8.1c

SEE FIGURE 8.1b

SEE FIGURE 8.1e

GRID NORTH

MAGNETIC NORTH

EDGE OF PREVIOUSLY DISTURBED AREA

LIMIT OF FULL EXCAVATION

FOUNDATION WALLS FROM DEMOLISHED DUANE STREET STRUCTURE

FOUNDATION WALLS FROM DEMOLISHED DUANE STREET STRUCTURES

FOUNDATION WALL FROM DEMOLISHED DUANE STREET STRUCTURE

FOUNDATION WALLS FROM DEMOLISHED READE STREET STRUCTURES

FOUNDATION WALLS FROM DEMOLISHED BROADWAY STRUCTURES

EDGE OF PREVIOUSLY DISTURBED AREA

EDGE OF PREVIOUSLY DISTURBED AREA

REAR WALL OF STANDING STRUCTURE (#14-26 READE STREET)

Late Middle Group Burial

Figure 8.1.a
Excavated Late-Middle Group Burials
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration
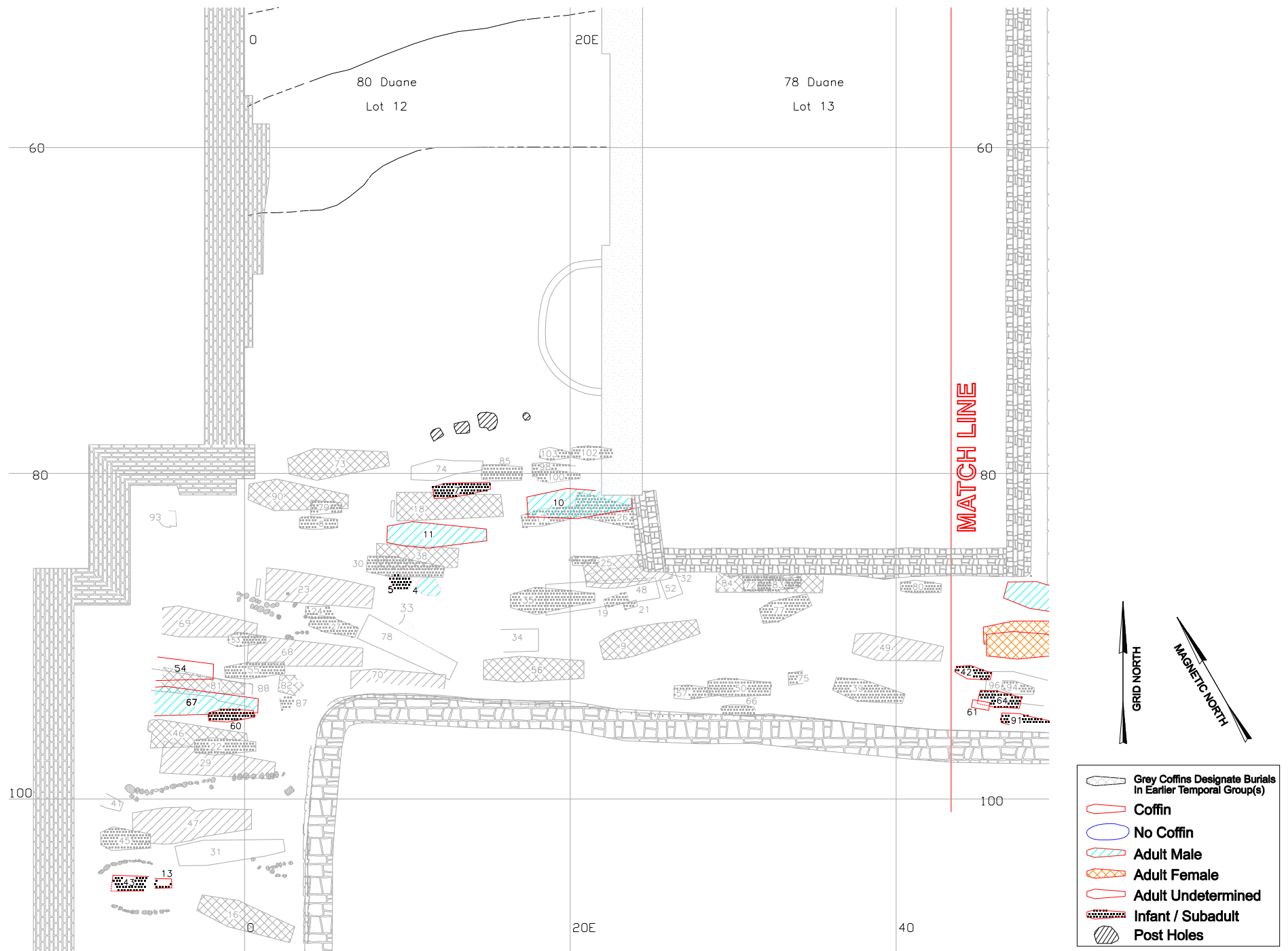
Figure 8.1.b
Late-Middle Group Burials, Western Area
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

Figure 8.1.c
Late-Middle Group Burials, West Central Area
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration
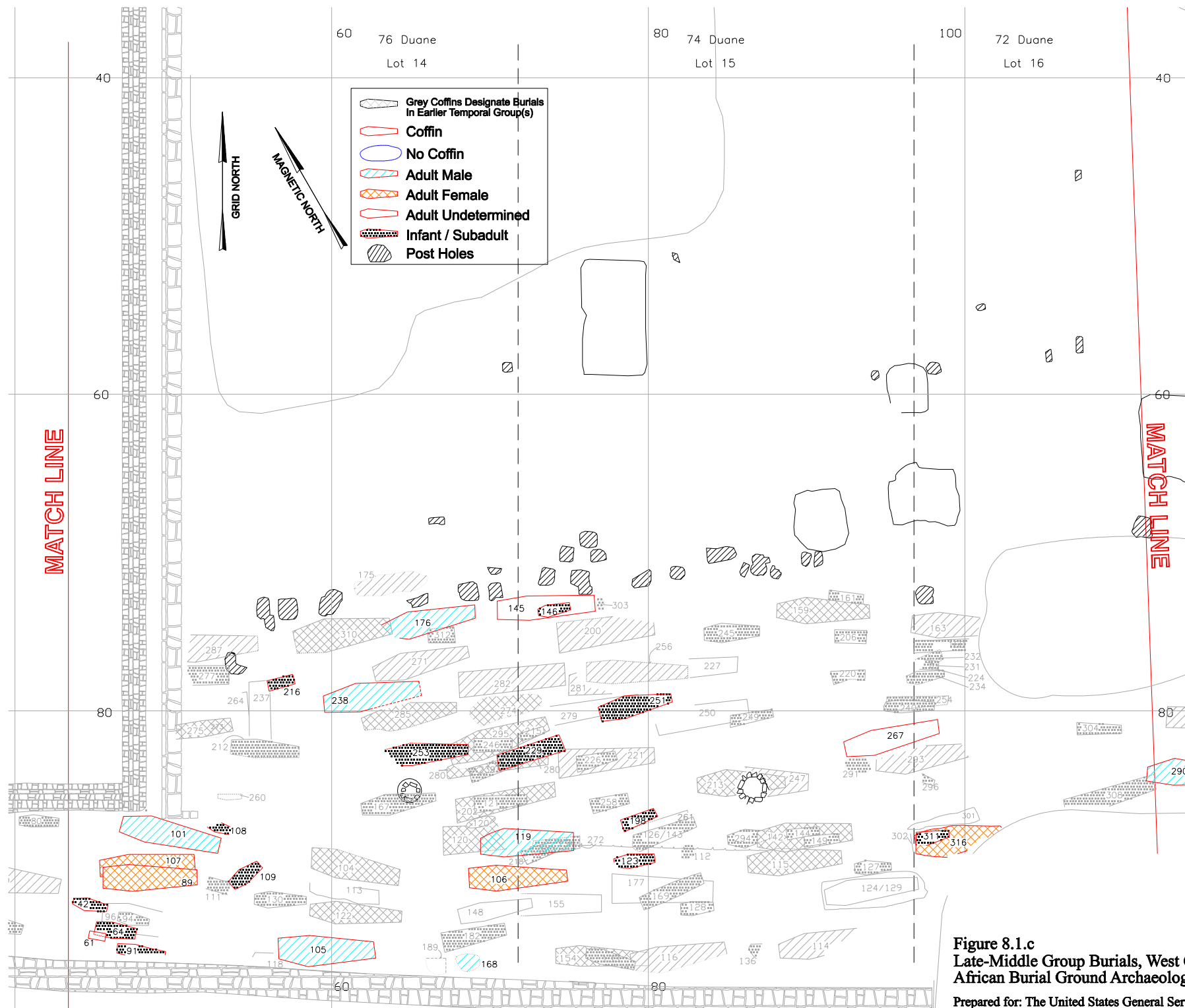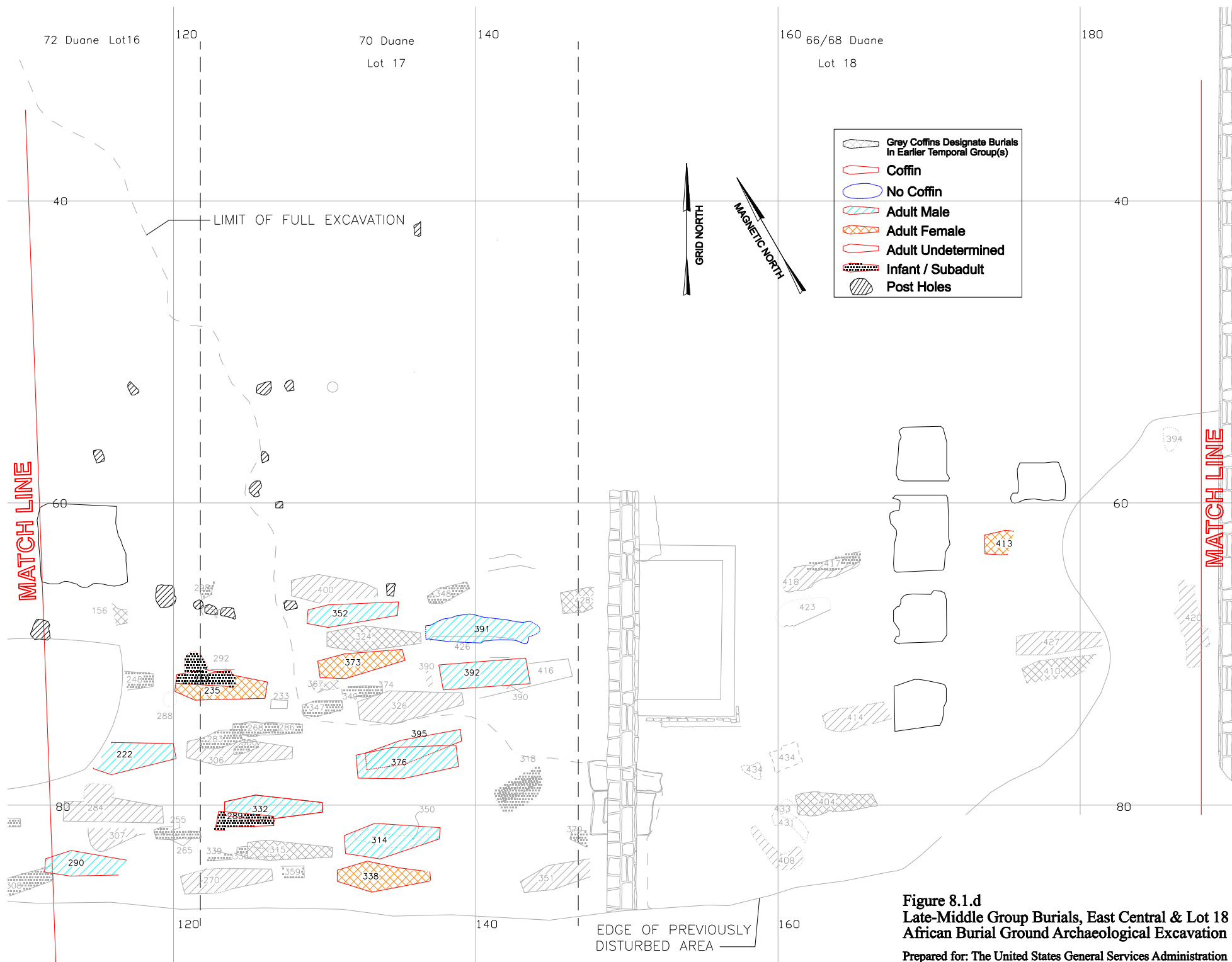
Figure 8.1.d
Late-Middle Group Burials, East Central & Lot 18 Areas
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration
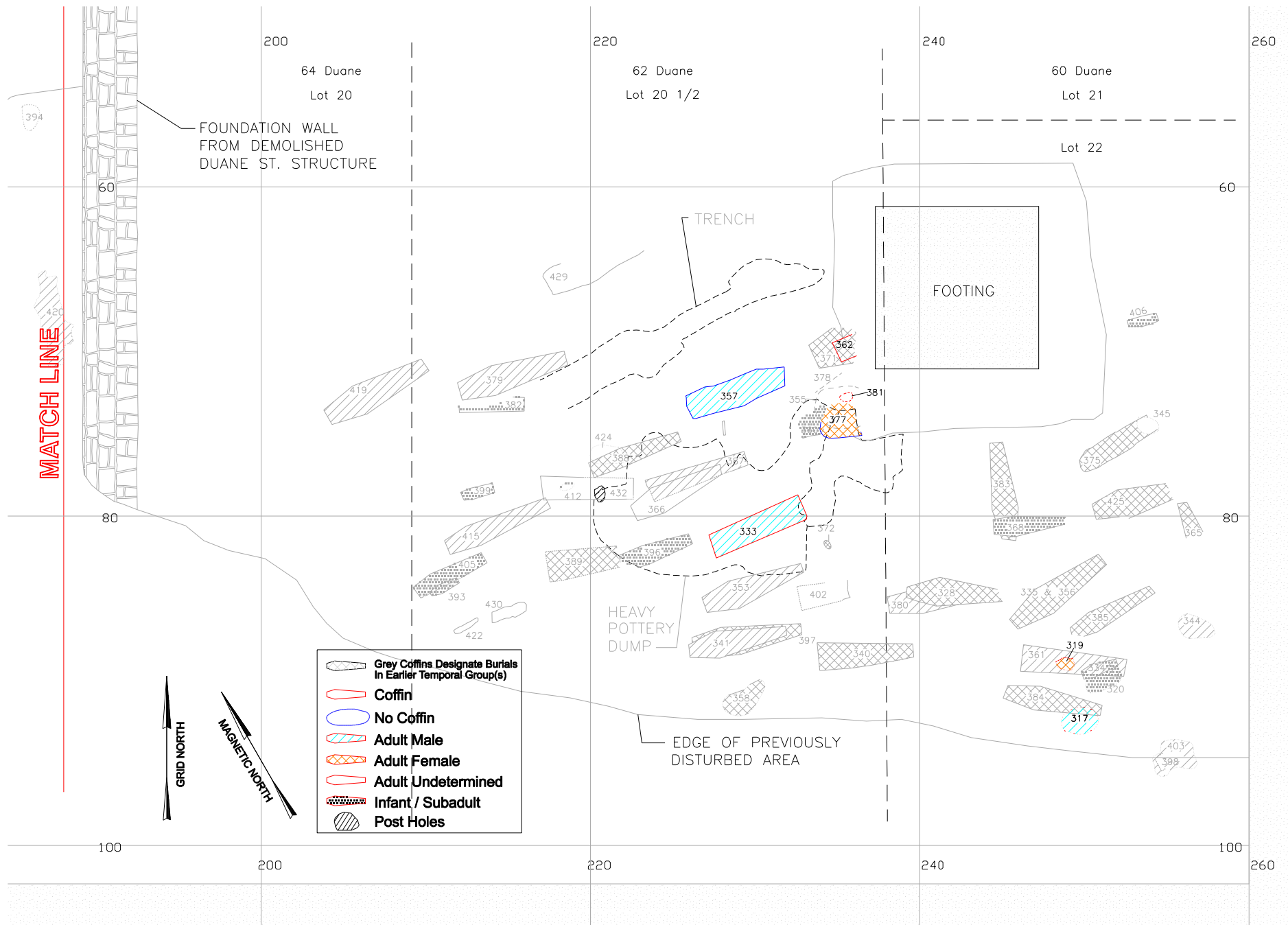
Figure 8.1.e
Late-Middle Group Burials, Eastern Area
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration
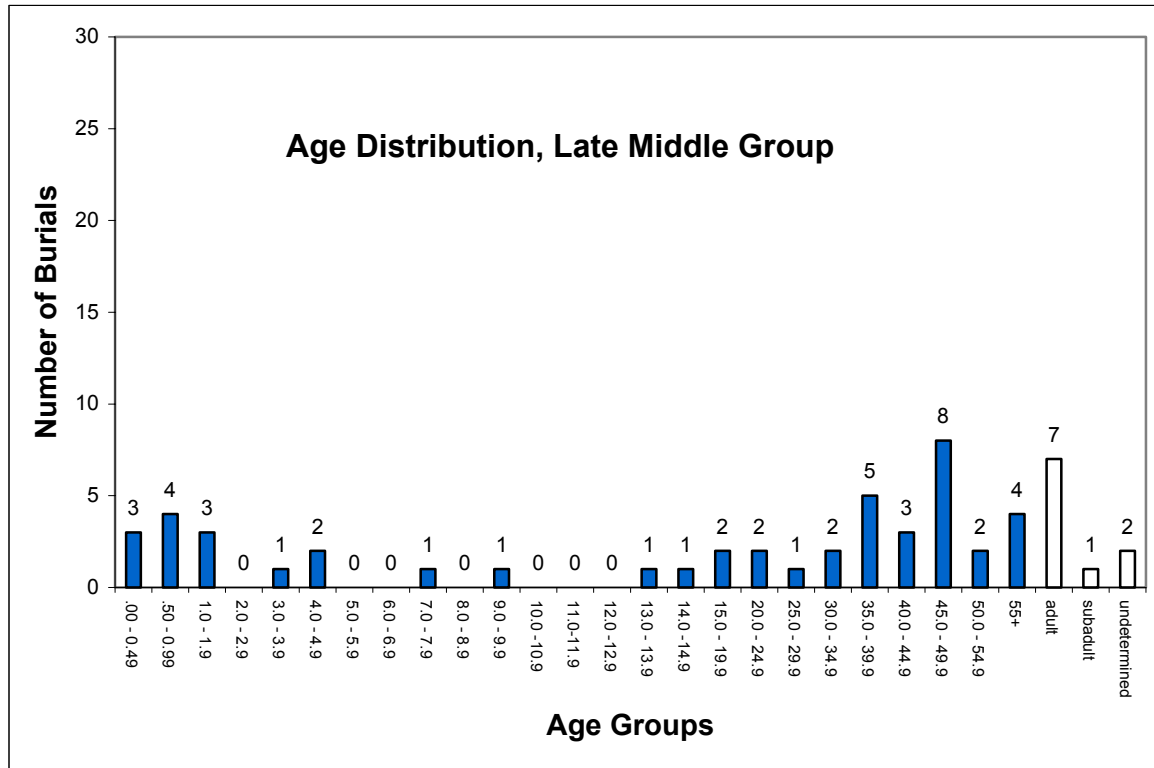
Figure 8.2.
Age distribution, Late-Middle Group. White bars are individuals whose age could not be determined
(includes only burials from which remains were recovered).
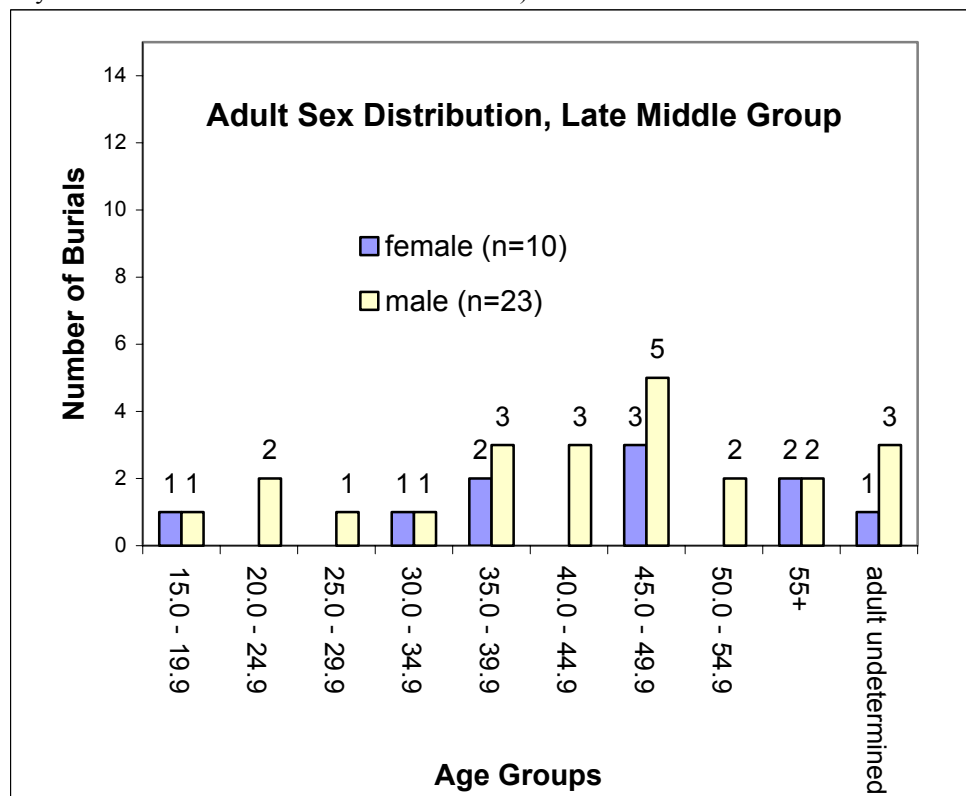
Figure 8.3.
Adult sex distribution, Late-Middle Group.

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8.C.   *Mortuary material culture*

Only three burials assigned to the Late-Middle Group were without coffins, Burials 357, 377, and 391. All three may in fact belong with the Late Group, which had most of the other coffin-less interments. However, lacking additional evidence such as stratigraphic superposition, spatial association, or late artifacts, we have kept them with the middle period graves, thus avoiding the tautology of placing them in the Late Group solely on the basis of having no coffins. It should be noted, however, that shifting these burials to the Late Group would enhance that cohort's distinctiveness (for example, two of the three are men, which matches the skewed sex distribution of the Late Group).

Coffins of adult burials in the Late-Middle Group were hexagonal except for those in Burials 333 and 392, which were rectangular. These were the only unambiguously rectangular adult coffins excavated at the site. Coffins of children and infants were hexagonal (9), rectangular (1), tapered (2), and four-sided but uncertain as to rectangular or tapered (1). Five were unidentifiable due to poor preservation.

Four of the five coffins at the African Burial Ground that were either clearly or probably decorated (in Burials 101, 176, 222, and 332) are assigned to the Late-Middle Group (the fifth, a possibly-decorated coffin in Burial 252, is assigned to the Late Group). This may reflect changing coffin style, and perhaps indicates that, by the third quarter of the 18th century, in some cases coffins were being displayed at the deceased's home or graveside. However, we stress the small number of decorated coffins and also would caution that some of these burials' Late Middle assignment *is based on the decorations themselves*: tacks forming the lid adornment were of a type manufactured in England beginning in the 1760s (see Chapter 10 for further discussion of coffins and hardware). All of the individuals in decorated coffins were identified as adult males or probable males. Burial 101 had a coffin with a heart-shaped design formed from tacks; the design has been identified as a possible Sankofa symbol. The coffin in Burial 176 had tacks edging the lid and six handles with back plates, each with cutout **< >** shapes. The coffin in Burial 222 also apparently had a tack design on the lid, though it was disturbed and could not be reconstructed. Burial 332 held a coffin with initials and a number formed in tacks. These coffins are illustrated in section 8.E and in Chapter 10.

Pins were found with 33 of the individuals in the Late-Middle Group, 73% of the 45 graves considered well enough preserved to expect them.[1] Men, women and children were among the 33. By contrast, only three (6%) of the graves, all of men, had clear evidence for clothing. Burial 10 contained thirteen copper-alloy buttons (eight whole; five with shanks only) in positions indicative of breeches and a jacket. Burial 238 had a bone button back that was recovered from the cervical vertebrae (neck) of its occupant, along with octagonal cuff links recovered from each wrist. Burial 333 had six bone buttons in the pelvic area. Burial 392 had eleven buttons, some in fragments and others associated with cloth; the positions of the buttons are indicative of breeches. This man

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[1] In one burial that was considered to have very poor ('n") preservation potential, pins were recovered with the bone.

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also had an octagonal cuff link face at the right clavicle (collar bone); the apparent mate was recovered in the laboratory when the cervical vertebrae were cleaned. The only other item of adornment found with a Late-Middle Group interment, the woman in Burial 107, was a single cylindrical red and green glass bead found during cleaning of the cranium in the laboratory; the bead may have been worn in her hair. Pins are discussed further in Chapter 11, buttons in Chapter 12, and the bead in Chapter 13.

8.D.   *Spatial distribution*

For convenience, we will look at spatial distribution of the Late Middle burials using the same sub-areas we used for the Middle Group (the western, west-central, east-central/Lot18, and southeast sub-areas, Figures 8.1a-e).

Burial orientations, all head-to-west in the graves assigned to the Late-Middle Group, were at angles that overall were more similar to those in the Middle Group than to those in the Late Group. Late-Middle Group burials, like the rest of the Middle Group, often appear to be sited with some sense of an appropriate separation from other burials. Again, as in the Middle Group, even children's graves sometimes seem to have been dug several feet apart from others, as though such separation was part of a standard practice. Burials 5, 7, 109, 123, and 198 were all children's graves that were spatially separated from other graves in the Late Middle temporal group; still, their deliberate placement above or near burials we have placed with the earlier groups is possible, so the apparent isolation may be false. By this time the cemetery was becoming increasingly crowded, and the "filling in" of spaces between earlier graves had clearly commenced. Though Late Middle graves might be spatially separated from one another, they most often overlay or lay close beside earlier graves.

The western area

The western part of the site is shown in Figure 8.1b. Burials 67, 60, and 54, all adjacent, were placed above earlier burials from both the Middle and Early Groups, though there is no way to determine whether or not they were deliberately sited with reference to the earlier graves (the cluster is shown on Figure 7.4). Burial 60, which held a baby of three to nine months, may have been deliberately placed at the foot of Burial 67, the grave of a man between forty and fifty, though the two had separate grave shafts indicating the child was interred later than the man. Burial 54 was about one foot to the north of Burial 67, and held a second adult, though because it was truncated from the legs up no sex or age could be assigned. All three form a possible group.

Burials 4, 4A, 5, 7, and 11 also were placed above earlier graves, possibly deliberately. As we mentioned in Chapter 6, the early Burial 18 had a headstone and therefore the deliberate placement of Burials 7 and 11 above and adjacent to it should be considered likely (though a social relationship cannot necessarily be inferred). Burials 7 and 11 also "fill in" between two Middle Group graves (Burials 74 on the north and 30 on the south), suggesting the spacing of graves, though tight, was deliberate. The entire cluster of

graves from Burial 74 south to Burials 4/4A/5 appears as a roughly linear arrangement, the graves nearly parallel. Burial 6, too, offset somewhat to the east, may have been added later. It is possible to envision the deliberate re-use of this small area over time, with Burial 18 as the "anchor" marked by a headstone.

In the southwestern-most corner of the excavation was the grave of a child between two and four years old, Burial 13/43 (excavated as two separate interments and subsequently determined to represent a single burial). This grave was outlined with a double arc of cobbles, found *in situ* (see Figure 5.7). It seems likely the cobble grave marker was tended until such time as this area was covered over with fill. Based on general stratigraphy in the area, and the fact that its rather ephemeral surface marker was intact, Burial 13/43 has been placed in the Late Middle temporal group, though it could be placed in the Middle cohort instead. This corner of the site gives us a tantalizing glimpse of the type of surface markers that once may have been used throughout the African Burial Ground (see additional description of the area in Chapters 6.C and 7.C). As we noted in Chapter 3, historic development as well machine stripping during the project resulted in the loss of the original surface layer over the majority of the site.

The west-central area

Burials in the Late Group in the west-central site area are shown in Figure 8.1c. We noted in Chapter 7 that Burials 96/94, an adult and child in a shared grave of the Middle Group, were surrounded and overlain by later graves of several more children, Burials 42, 64, 61, and 91. We cannot determine how close in time all of the interments occurred, but place the latter four in the Late-Middle Group because of their stratigraphic relationship to the double burial. The entire cluster exhibits a relatively uniform orientation, slightly northward of grid west, suggesting the earliest grave may have been marked at the surface and the later graves deliberately aligned with it. The single adult, in Burial 96, appears to have anchored the grouping.

There was a "gap" or void in Late-Middle Group burials from approximately 55' to 70' Grid East and approximately 80' to 95' Grid South. Within the void was a smaller circular area without graves from any period (see Figure 1.7). The absence of burials there is intriguing. The circular arrangement of graves around a central void may allude to, or reproduce, a cosmogram. But it also may allude to former topography, such as a mound, that had been destroyed through leveling, with soil from the top of the mound scattered to become part of the overlying fill (on burials arranged around mounds at Newton Plantation, see Handler and Lange 1978:105-117).

On the west side of the void were Burials 108, 101, 107, 89, and 109. Burials 101 and 108 may represent a deliberate pairing of an infant with a man, though the excavation records do not clarify the relationship between the two grave cuts. Burial 101 had the coffin with the heart-shaped design on its lid; this burial held a man between twenty-six and thirty-five years of age. Burials 89 and 107 represent the possible shared grave of a woman in her fifties placed above a woman in her late thirties. The two hexagonal

coffins were essentially parallel and precisely aligned. They were just to the south of Burial 101, though oriented differently.

Northeast of the void, Burials 176, 238, and 253 appear to be "filling in" between Middle Group burials along a north-south row. The northernmost of these, Burial 176, appears to have been placed along the south side of the fence that once marked the northern boundary of the cemetery. Just to its east, Burials 145 (containing an empty adult coffin) and 146 (of an infant in a coffin) also seem to have been placed up against the fence line, though not due to crowding, since there was space to the south. It is possible the Middle and Late-Middle Group graves in the area were deliberately placed so as not to disturb early graves, Burials 200 and 282.

Burial 145 suggests one of three scenarios: a stolen cadaver, removal of the remains for secondary burial, or deliberate burial of an empty coffin for either religious purposes or for deception. The fact that the Burial 146 child coffin was placed atop the empty coffin argues against the body-snatching scenario. As we noted for the empty coffins of the Middle Group (see Chapter7.E), there is no way to choose among possible explanations.

East of the void, Burials 119 and 106 were placed adjacent to each other, only a foot apart and parallel, as though a pair. An underlying early grave, Burial 120, was partially displaced when Burial 119 was interred, suggesting that the gravedigger was unaware of the previous burial, but bones from Burial 120 were set aside with some care rather than simply mixed with the shaft fill. Three other underlying interments, Burials 263, 272, and 218, were left intact by Burial 119.

The east-central area

Four pairs of graves are noted in the east-central area (Figure 8.1d): Burials 289 and 332, Burials 219 and 235, Burials 376 and 395, and Burials 314 and 338. Burial 289, which held a child between five and nine years old buried with a tiny quartz crystal, was placed so as to overlap with Burial 332, the grave of a man whose initials "HW" and probable age "38" were tacked on his coffin lid (see the illustrations in section 8.E and in Chapter 10). Burial 219 held a young child buried above a woman in her thirties, within the latter's grave shaft.

Burials 376 and 395 were of men whose age ranges extended from forty-five and forty-three to sixty and fifty-three. The pair is placed in the Late-Middle Group because they appear to have been part of a north-south "row" of burials that filled in between existing Middle Group graves (see Figure 1.7 for the distribution of burials from all temporal groups in this area). This row may have extended all the way to the north edge of the site, but the interments north of the fence line are assigned to the Late Group. Burials 352 and 373 are part of this row. At the south end of the row are Burials 314 and 338, a pairing of a man between forty and fifty and a woman age thirty-three to sixty-five whose coffins seem to have been placed side-by-side and parallel, though in apparent separate grave shafts.

At the east edge of the east-central area, Burials 391 and 392 are somewhat problematic in their assignment. Both may in fact belong with Late Group burials. In the case of Burial 391 this is suggested by its lack of a coffin, but again, we have not used this variable alone to place interments in the last period. Burial 392 seems to have totally disturbed an underlying Middle Group burial (Burial 391), and thus the interments may have been separated by many years. However, this area was never fully excavated, and burial relationships are not clear-cut. It seems prudent to place both burials in the Late-Middle Group, with the caveat, rather than in the Late Group. Burial 392 will be described in section 8.E.

The southeast area

Two burials in the southeast area of the excavated site (Figure 8.1e) were assigned to the Late Middle period on the basis of artifacts recovered from the grave shaft fill (Burials 333 and 357), and two additional, disturbed burials were placed in this group on the basis of stratigraphic position (Burials 317 and 319).

Burials 333 and 357 were oriented identically to numerous Middle Group burials in the immediate vicinity. Two Early Group burials nearby were also parallel (Burials 387 and 388). The very strong alignment of all of these interments suggests the gravediggers used some constant feature to orient the openings, and/or, of course, that they were all purposefully aligned with each other. As noted in Chapter 7, a trench (Feature 163) with a similar orientation ran just to the north of these graves, and the trench itself may have provided the alignment, or it too may have followed another feature.

8.E.   *Unique and unusual burials*

Decorated coffins

Coffin decorations that survived archaeologically were very rare at the African Burial Ground, but there were four (out of five overall) in the Late-Middle Group. Photographs and drawings taken during excavation show the coffin lids of Burials 101, 176, and 332 (Figures 8.4-8.8), but Burial 222, which had tacks that apparently formed a decorative lid pattern, was disturbed by vandals before the decoration was recorded.

Two of these burials held individuals that can confidently be identified as men (Burials 101 and 176), and the other two (Burials 222 and 332) held individuals that were very likely men as well. Calculated age ranges were twenty to twenty-four (Burial 176), twenty-six to thirty-five (Burial 101), and thirty-five to forty (Burial 332). Burial 222 could not be assigned an age range. Burials 222 and 332 were located just five feet apart, in the east-central part of the site. Burials 101 and 176 were not close by each other, but both were in the same general area, in the west-central part of the site. It is noteworthy that the men in Burials 101, 176, and 332 each had a child or infant buried either immediately adjacent to or above his grave.

The tack pattern on the lid of the Burial 101 coffin was first described as heart shaped, with unidentified designs within the outline of the heart. As discussed in Chapter 10, the interior decoration may be initials and a date of death. In this case, the upper portion, which would be the initials, has not been deciphered (the tacks displaced as the coffin wood rotted); the lower portion *may* have formed numerals for the year "1769."

Figure 8.4. (left)
In situ photograph of coffin lid decoration formed of iron tacks in Burial 101. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

Figure 8.5. (below)
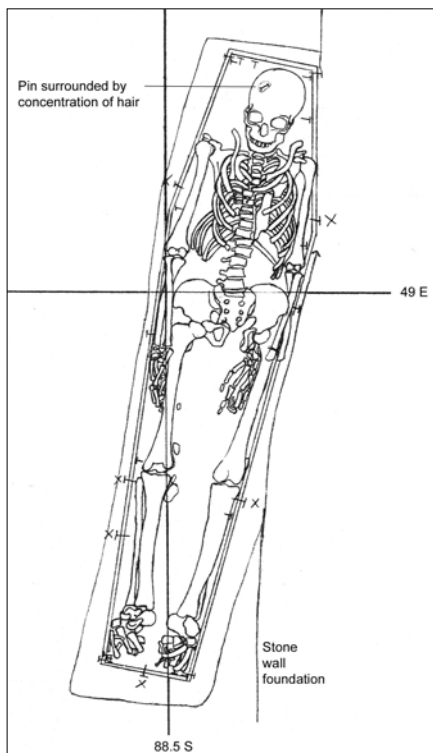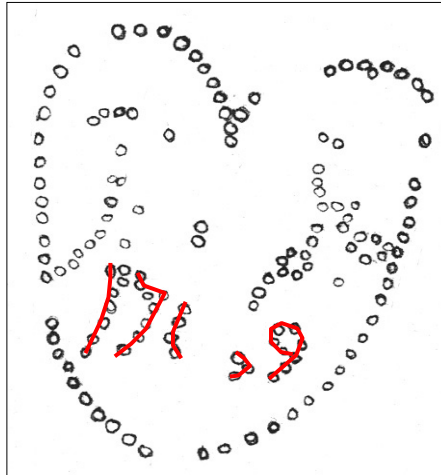Possible reading of the year "1769" formed by tacks on the lid of Burial 101.

Figure 8.6. (left)
In situ drawing of Burial 101 skeletal remains. Scale is 1 inch = 2 feet. Drawings by M. Schur.

The heart-like design has also been identified as a Sankofa symbol associated with Twi-speaking Akan people of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The symbol depicts a proverb, "Se wo were fi na wo sankofa a yenkyi" which can be translated as "It is not a taboo to return and fetch it when you forget." It reminds people of the need to "[tie] the past with the present in order to prepare for the future" (Ofori-Ansa 1995:3).

Two straight pins, one on the cranium (with a small tuft of hair) and one in the chest area, were

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found with the bones, but no other artifacts were recovered. Excavators recorded two possible bone button fragments on the left leg; no buttons were cataloged in the laboratory, however, and it is possible the observed pieces were simply fragments of the skeleton.

One of the man's incisors had been intentionally filed, a practice found in Africa and a possible indicator of his birth on that continent. Chemical analysis was undertaken in an attempt to determine whether the man had spent the early part of his life in Africa, but strontium isotope levels overlapped those of individuals from the cemetery population that are likely to have been born in New York (young children), while lead levels were low, close to those in other individuals with modified teeth. The man's nativity remains ambiguous.

Preservation of the skeleton was excellent (Figure 8.6) and several pathologies were observed, including signs of periostitis (bone scarring due to inflammation from bacterial infection or injury) on the cranium and legs; "saber shin" (suggesting he had treponemal disease); stress-affected muscle attachments at the elbows; conditions of the bones at the joints that indicated mild to severe arthritis; enamel hypoplasias on the teeth suggesting childhood nutritional stress; and severe molar caries with indications of likely abscesses and perhaps infections of the surrounding bone.

The coffin in Burial 176 was the only one excavated that had a full set of coffin handles, two on each side and one at each end (see Chapter 10 for illustrations and discussion). Its lid was decorated with iron tacks around the entire perimeter, spaced two inches apart— also unique within the excavated sample (Figures 8.7 and 8.8).

Figure 8.7. (left)
In situ photograph of excavation showing iron tacks edging the lid of the Burial 176 coffin. Six handles were also found. The ruler is measured in feet; north is to the right. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

Figure 8.8. (below)
In situ photograph of one of the Burial 176 coffin handles during excavation. The ruler is measured in inches. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

The lid tacks and handles were recorded *in situ* during excavation. The only other artifact found in association with the remains was a straight pin fragment from the jaw/neck area. It is possible Burial 312, of an infant, was placed immediately adjacent to the Burial 176 grave, though the stratigraphic relationship is not clear.

Only one of the graves excavated at the African Burial Ground held a clue to the name of the deceased. This was Burial 332, where the coffin lid had been decorated with iron tacks forming the initials "HW" ("M" is an alternative, but perhaps less likely reading of the first letter) and a number, probably "38" (Figure 8.9). The number was probably the man's age, which agrees closely with the age range calculated from skeletal analysis (thirty-five to forty). Thus far, documentary sources have not yielded any record of a man with initials H.W. who is likely to have been laid to rest at the African Burial Ground, but future compilations of the names of African New Yorkers or escapees from out of town may yet reveal a plausible identity.

Figure 8.9. (above)
Left: *in situ* photograph of Burial 332 coffin lid decoration formed of iron tacks. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.
Right: reconstruction of initials "HW" and number "38." The coffin lid had split longitudinally, severing the "H" and the likely "3."

Figure 8.10. (right)
In situ photograph of "H W" (Burial 332) skeletal remains after removal of the coffin lid. The ruler is measured in feet, and north is to the right. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

There were just two items recovered from this burial other than the coffin and the skeletal remains (Figure 8.10). One straight pin and a lock of hair were recorded under the right side of the cranium; during cleaning of the thoracic vertebrae in the laboratory a curved copper-alloy object was recovered, adhering to a fragment of coffin wood. The latter may have been the remnant of an earring or a curved pin (see Chapter 13). As noted in section 8.D, a child of five to nine years old (Burial 289) may have been deliberately buried immediately above "HW."

Burial 392

Burial 392 was one of just four interments in the excavated sample that was oriented with the head toward the east. It also contained a rectangular coffin, one of only two adult coffins that were clearly of this shape. One explanation for the east-headed orientation is that the symmetrical coffin was lowered into the grave without the bearers knowing which end was the head, though deliberate placement is also possible. The coffin was of unique construction among those recorded at this site, with at least two cross pieces nailed to the lengthwise boards of the lid (Figure 8.11).
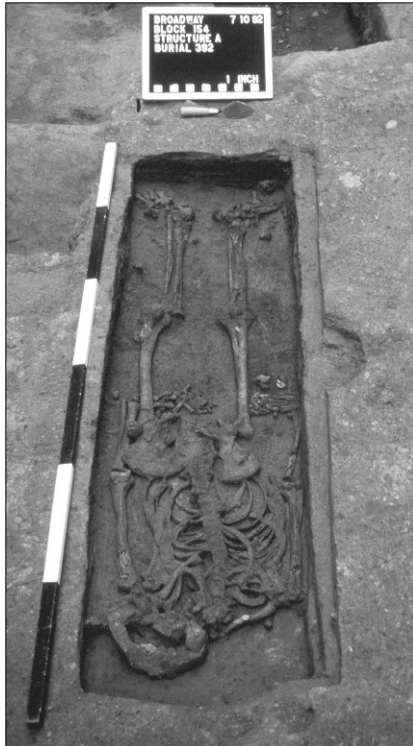
The man in Burial 392 was buried wearing breeches, as evidenced by buttons found at the knees and hips (see Chapter 12). In addition, two octagonal cuff link or button faces were found in the neck/shoulder area. The skeletal remains were in poor condition, complete but crushed and very eroded. Three possible urinary stones were removed from below the hip, and possible healed fractures of the left kneecap and right ribs were also noted.

Figure 8.11.
In situ photograph of Burial 392. The ruler alongside the remains is measured in feet; north is to the right.
Photograph by Stan Bottitta.